

## **North Liberty History**

It is recorded in the pages of history that John Gaylor and his family were the first to come to the North Liberty area, arriving in the summer of 1838. He made a claim to land in what later became Section 7 in Penn Township.

Mr. Gaylor sold his claim to John Wilson and then moved back to Illinois. According to the description, this claim was East of Front Street. Penn Meadows Park and the former Methodist Church are on a part of this land.

Nineteen years after Gaylor made the first claim for land, North Liberty was platted in 1857. The original town was only one block wide. It was bounded on the east by Front Street, on the west by Main Street, on the south by Zeller Street, and on the north by Penn Street. The land was originally owned by Francis and Margaret Bowman and Patrick and Ann Murphy. The Bowman's daughter Martha, who was a school teacher, chose the name for the town.

On a map published in 1900, the land west of Main Street was farm land owned by Nicholas Zeller. It was developed after 1900, about the time the interurban was put into service in 1904. It is generally agreed upon that more than any other early factor, the passenger rail service contributed most to the early growth of the town.

On this same map, there is no Dubuque Street. This street was established when the road was paved from Iowa City to Cedar Rapids in 1926. Before Dubuque Street was created to provide a direct route through town, the old road came into town from the south, turned west on Zeller, north on Front, west on Cherry, north on Main and then out of town on what was known as the angling road.

When automobiles became more plentiful, a Red Ball Route was established between St. Louis and St. Paul (the first Avenue of the Saints). The route was marked by red balls painted on white background, on telephone poles or fence posts etc. The route passed through North Liberty from the south and at first was plain dirt. It turned off the angling road at Zeller Street, went west to Front Street and then north out of town on the other end of the angling road.

North Liberty has literally come full circle since it's early beginnings. Long ago the town was self sustaining. It had sufficient businesses and community services like medical care, churches and entertainment to make it possible to spend most of one's time in their own town. Nearby farmers provided key resources and jobs in the community and were part of it. In the mid to late 1900's, the nature of the town changed drastically. Farmers became fewer and fewer. People needed to drive to jobs elsewhere and North Liberty became known as a bedroom town; one where the residents slept at night, but conducted most of their day elsewhere. With the rapid recent growth in both population and community services, varied businesses flourish in town and people find it possible again to work, shop, worship, and play in their own town.

## **Chronology of Some Events in North Liberty History**

1838 - John Gaylor was first white settler in the area

1839 - J.B. and A.C. Denison arrived and broke the first furrow on land in section 12,  
later owned by Isaac Myers.

1840 - The following families had arrived: David and Carson Wray, George Wein,  
Jacob H., Joseph A., and John W. Alt, Joseph I. Clark, Martin Harless, Robert  
Waterson, John Aslan, Gilbert and Frank Herrington, and James Chamberlin.

1841 - Methodist class organized (Alts, Weins, Wrays, Denisons) 8 members

1843 - Log school house was constructed

1846 - Penn Post Office was organized at North Liberty on Feb 10

1849 - or 1850 what later became Ridgewood Cemetery was started by James Chambelin, JB Dennison, Elder Snavely, Elder Jacob Lininger and others.

1857 - North Liberty platted

1860 - First frame school house built

1865 - Martin George sold lots 5-9 to Robert Stewart for \$600 (later became site of city offices)

1865 - Nathan Owens was Justice of the Peace-he signed the deed mentioned above

1865 - The IRS issued a physician licence to David Stewart

1868 - Lutheran Church built (Bowmans, VonSteins, Zellers & others)

1877 - S. B. Myers was drawn into the saw by a slab and had his leg amputated by Dr. Stewart and Dr. Young. The saw mill belonged to Chamerlin, Myers & Moreland.

1883 - There were 7 schools and 4 churches in the area

1895 - First frame Methodist Church built

1899 - New 2 story, 3 room school house built (burned in 1971)

1903 - Telephone system installed

1904 - Interurban began passenger service

1905 - Electricity to North Liberty

1908 - North Liberty street lights were installed

1913 - North Liberty incorporated (Julius Kohl first mayor)

1926 - Road from Iowa City to Cedar Rapids was paved

1936 - Worst winter in memory for most residents

1949 - Arthur Alt was hit by a car, PTA and Community Improvement Assoc. petition for signs to be erected on the highway

1953 - Interurban ceased operation

1959 - Last classes in old school building

1960 - Population was 364

1960 - New Penn Elementary school finished

1967 - Population was 783 (special census taken)

1967 - Dial phones installed by South Slope Telephone Inc.

1967 - Sewage Treatment plant opened

1969 - New Post Office finished (1968?)

1971 - Old school house burned (1974?)

1972 - Joe & Agda Alt sold Stewart home to city for site of the city hall and fire station

1973 - Stewart home removed by controlled burn

1973 - North Liberty Fire Department started with their own equipment

1975 - Fire station and city hall built

1977 - City water system completed

1984 - Penn Meadows Park dedicated July 22nd

1985 - Additions made to city offices and library opened

1990 - Population was 2,926

1994 - North Liberty's 5th well drilled

1994 - Council votes for a new water tower

1994 - Ground broken for Grace Community Church

1994 - Population was 3,666

Penn/North Liberty Firsts

First **marriage** Nathaniel Scales and Nancy Crozier on August 30, 1842, officiated by Judge Fernando H. Lee

First **teacher**-Benjamin Horner

First **school** in 1842 in the Crozier cabin.

First **frame school** house in 1860.

First **death**, child of Martin Harless (buried on the claim)

First **physician** - William Crawford.

First **settler in the big bend** of the river, Nathaniel Scales.

First **board of trustees**-A. C. Dennison, Jacob H. Alt, and Stephen Maynard.

First **clerk** of the township- John W. Alt

First **treasurer**-John Wilson

First **boy to come** to the township, son of Alonzo Dennison.

First **girl born** in the area, daughter of John Gaylor.

First **sermon** in Wilson's Grove by Rev. Lineback a Methodist preacher. Since there is a large grove of old trees at the northeast corner of Penn Meadows Park, I think it was Wilson's Grove.

First **grinding** was brought in by JB and George Denison who stopped in Davenport to have a load of wheat from Illinois ground. When told it would take a month, they bought 100 pounds of flour and went back for the rest later. Later a mill was opened at West Liberty (Wapsienonok)

First **child buried in Wein/Alt cemetery** was child of CB Wray.

First **burial in Ridgewood Cemetery** was Mary, daughter of J. Lininger in 1850.

Dr. Orrin built **first house in North Liberty** & kept **first post office**.

First **city administrator** was Patrick McGarvey in 1990.

First **housing for the elderly** was finished, called Foursquare Apartments in 1978.

In 1953, North Liberty purchased its first **speed analyzer** to catch speeding cars. It was operated by town marshall Charles H. Keefer.

in 1976, the first **American Legion post** in North Liberty received its charter. It was named Bicentennial Post 1976 and the first Post Commander was John Hartnett who served in the Air Force in Korea.

First **snow to fall in September** on 9/26/1942.

Rev. Tenant organized a **boy scout troupe** about 1940-1941 which I think was the first.

Date, name, and county or city in Pennsylvania they lived in at some time...

1839 - Alt family (York)  
1840 - David Crozier (Fayette)  
1841 - James Chamberlin (Adams)  
1842 - Alexander L. Moreland (Franklin)  
1842 - Orville Babcock (Erie)  
1845 - John L. Moreland (Franklin)  
1845 - Valentine Meyers (Cumberland)  
1846 - Nicholas Zeller Sr. (Cumberland)  
1846 - John Kepford (Cumberland)  
1846 - Martin George (Cumberland)  
1846 - Jacob Bowman (Cumberland)  
1847 - Jonathan Hawk (Lancaster)  
1848 - Abraham Meyers (Lancaster)  
1848 - Michael Snavely (Dauphin & Cumberland)  
1849 - Jacob Zeller (Cumberland)  
1849 - Nicholas Zeller Jr. (Franklin)  
1849 - Jacob Lininger (Cumberland)  
1849 - John Meyers (York)  
1849 - Mathias Albright (York)  
1850 - Peter VonStein (Chambersburg)  
1851 - Michael Zeller (Cumberland)  
1852 - James Bridenstine (Huntington)  
1853 - George Anderson (Bedford)  
1853 - John Anderson (Bedford)  
1856 - Samuel Alloway (Huntington)  
1859 - Isaac Meyers (York)  
1860 - David Stewart (Huntington)  
1866 - Robert Stewart (Huntington)  
1866 - Jacob F. Price (Bedford)  
1874 - Samuel Meyers (York)  
1875 - Harry A. White (Bedford)  
1881 - David Ziegler (Cumberland)

#### Other names for North Liberty

North Liberty was officially named by Martha J. Bowman, daughter of Frances Bowman and a teacher in the area. Her father was one of the original owners of the land on which North Liberty eventually grew. This occurred in 1857 when the town was platted.

Before that, the area was known by several other names. One of the most unusual was Squash Bend. The story goes that a doctor Josiah Crawford moved to the area around 1842 (Irving Weber gets credit for finding the date and the first two explanations). I have read three explanations for the name: 1) because of the abundance of squash grown in the area 2) because he was a botanical doctor and existed on a diet of squash and pumpkin and 3) that when he moved here he was short of cash and his family had to live off squash and other things he could grow for months. (Press Citizen article) What do YOU think??

Other names were North Bend and Big Bend. These came from the fact that an area of northern Penn Township is largely surrounded by the bend that the Iowa River makes before it turns and goes southward.

The last name that I have come across is Scales Bend. The road which goes out to the campground, past the Ridgewood Cemetery is called Scales Bend Road. It was named for Nathaniel Scales. You can read his story by clicking the button at the bottom of the screen.

## Quiz About North Liberty History

Have your parents try to answer these questions and see how much they know about North Liberty history!

1. Which two buildings (still existing today) used to be banks?
2. Where was the barber shop in the late 1950's?
3. Who was Julius Kohl?
4. Where did the I.O.O.F. building used to be located? What does I.O.O.F. stand for?
5. Where is the Alt cemetery?
6. What rail service carried passengers in and out of town?
7. What rail service carried freight in and out of town? How did it get its name?
8. Where did the Lutheran church used to stand?
9. What are the names of at least two doctors who used to practice in North Liberty?
10. What business did four of the Mehaffey brothers work for?
11. What product was made in the mill operated by the George family and where did they live?
12. Can you name a North Liberty resident killed in the Civil War?
13. What man was married for 72 years, then married again at the age 95?
14. What are at least two earlier names for North Liberty?
15. Can you name at least one past resident named for Iowa's statehood?

Some information about my Grandmother, Emma who kept a diary when she was a girl.

My name is Emma Stewart Alt.

I was born in a log house about a mile from North Liberty in 1869. My father was a doctor and eventually moved into a house in town. We lived there and he also had his medical practice there. That house was torn down in 1973 to make room for a new fire station and city offices.

I was married in 1889 to Mr. Rollie Alt. He was born just down the road from where I lived. His father came to North Liberty in 1838. He was one of the very first settlers in the area. Rollie and I had six children and one of my granddaughters still lives on the land where I first lived.

One thing that I liked to do was to ride horses. The outfit that I am wearing is my good riding clothes. It is called a riding habit. It has a very wide skirt because I didn't ride in the saddle like men did. I rode with both legs hanging down the same side of the saddle. I had a special saddle. One of my horses names was Jewel.

Another thing I liked to do was go to Literary Club. That was in the days before North Liberty had a modern library like you are used to. A group of people decided to collect their books together and once a month or so, they met and exchanged books and talked about them. Here is one of the books that belonged to the Literary Society. You can still see the label inside.

Another thing I liked to do was to make quilts out of the small pieces of cloth that were left over when our mother made new clothes for us. Sometimes instead of a big blanket sized cover, we made pillow sized quilts like this one. We used fancy stitches around each piece and they were called crazy quilts.

I lived to be over 90 years old and saw many changes in North Liberty. I am glad to know that children will still remember me and are interested in our town's history.